



December 15, 2014

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CDCR, CAL FIRE To Staff Ventura Fire Camp

Inmate Fire Fighting Crews Will Increase Protection In a Vulnerable Region

SACRAMENTO –To strengthen wildfire protection in a crucial stretch of coastal Southern California, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and CAL FIRE today jointly announced that they will return inmate fire crews full-time to a Ventura County camp that has been used sporadically in recent years.

The first of what is ultimately anticipated to be 100 inmate fire fighters are expected to arrive at Ventura Camp # 46 in Camarillo by December 17.

Formerly known as the S. Carraway Public Service and Fire Center, the conservation camp had been staffed with juvenile offender fire fighters between 1990 and 2011, when a declining number of incarcerated juveniles forced the camp to consolidate with another in Amador County. Since then, CAL FIRE has staged inmate fire crews at the site temporarily when they were needed.

“Returning these crews permanently to Ventura will reinforce our ability to protect a highly populated region that is vulnerable to fire danger,” noted Jeffrey Beard, Secretary of Corrections and Rehabilitation, who noted that the inmate fire crews closest to the region are assigned to CALFIRE camps in San Luis Obispo and Palmdale, both more than 100 miles away.

“We are excited to be able to have the inmate staffing to increase not only the region’s fire protection, but also the brush clearance projects in which the crews will perform,” said Chief Ken Pimlott, CAL FIRE Director. “These inmates will go through a rigorous fire training program and become a key component to California’s fire response.”

The state’s 4,300 inmate fire fighters are critical to controlling wildfires across the state. This year, inmate fire crews responded to well over 5,500 wildfires, which is 1,000 more wildfires than in a typical year. When they are not working to contain wildfires, inmate crews perform community service projects year-round, including brush-clearing projects to reduce fire danger.

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CDCR has supplied inmate fire fighters to CAL FIRE since 1946. Only inmates convicted of low level felonies, with records of good behavior, who can meet the physical requirements of the rigorous work, and who are within two to five years of their release date are accepted as firefighters. They are housed in 39 CAL FIRE camps across the state and five Los Angeles County camps and are closely supervised when they work on projects in the community.

The move to restore full time crews to Ventura was supported by local officials. “I believe a fully functioning camp in Ventura County will provide vital resources that will benefit all of our residents,” said Geoff Dean, Ventura County Sheriff.

Kathy Long, Ventura County Supervisor, supported the recommendation of Sheriff Dean and Ventura County Fire Chief Mark Lorenzen to revive the staffing at the camp. “This local resource is critical to uphold our commitment to protect Ventura County residents and their property from the effects of natural disasters in this high risk community,” said Long.

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